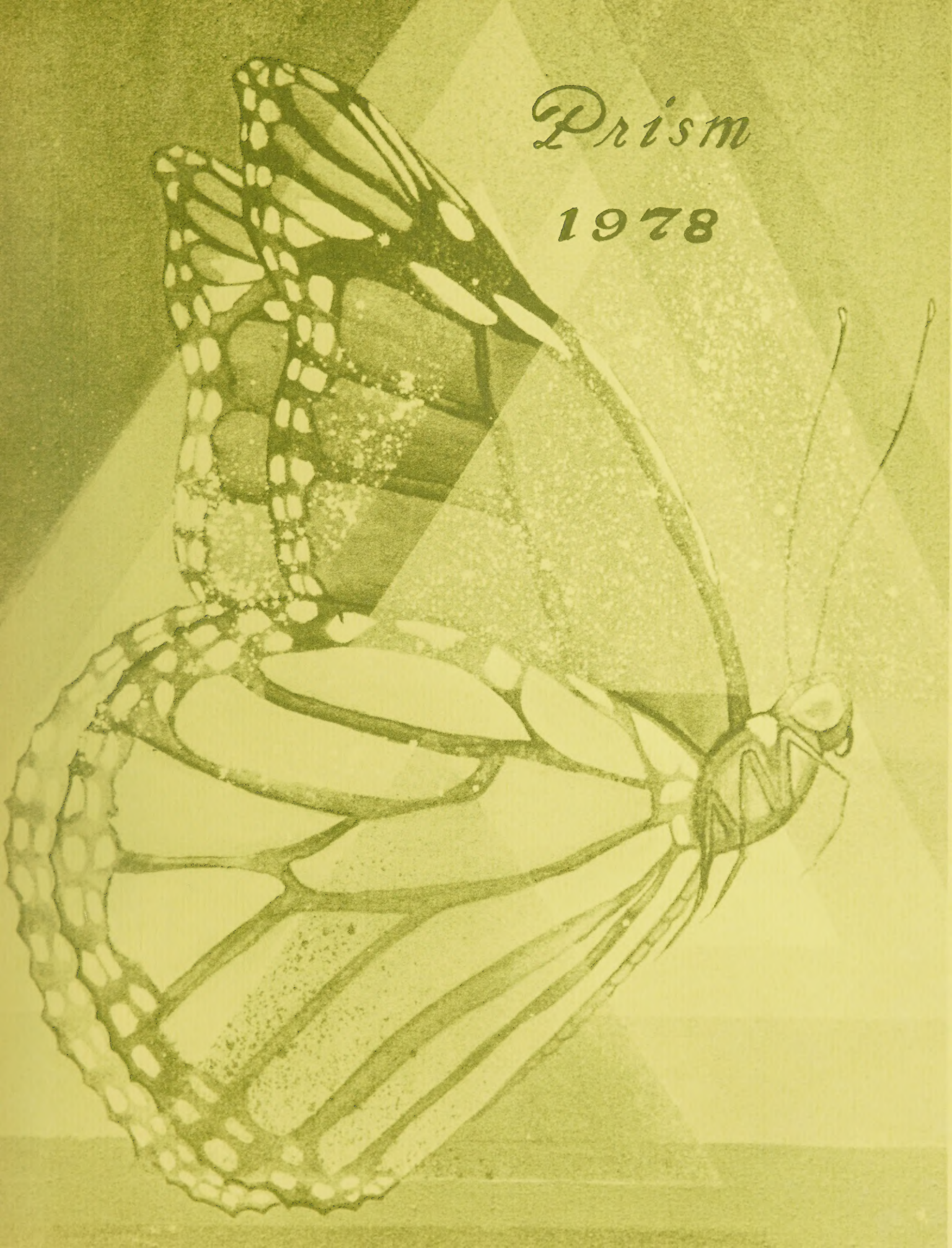
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1978

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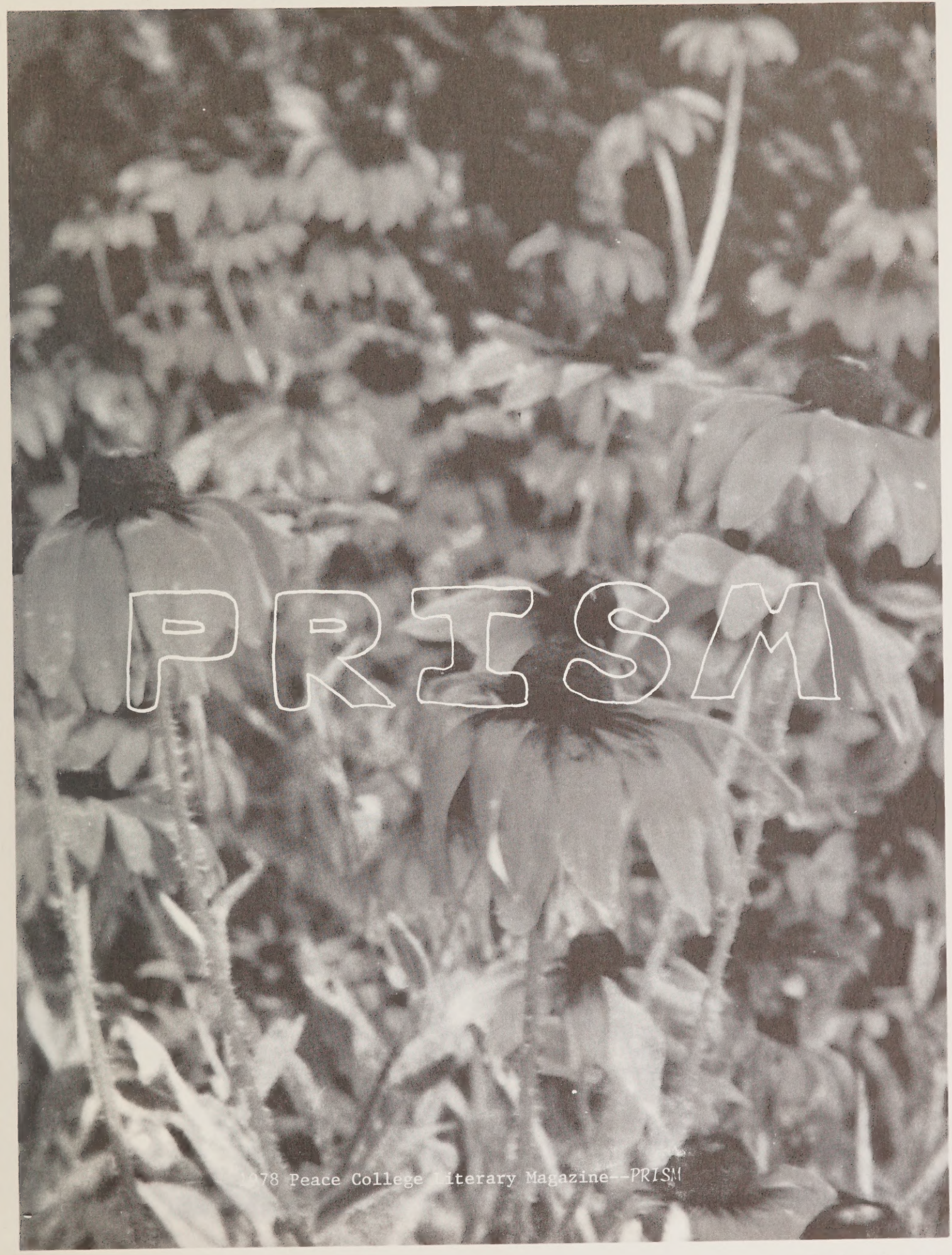
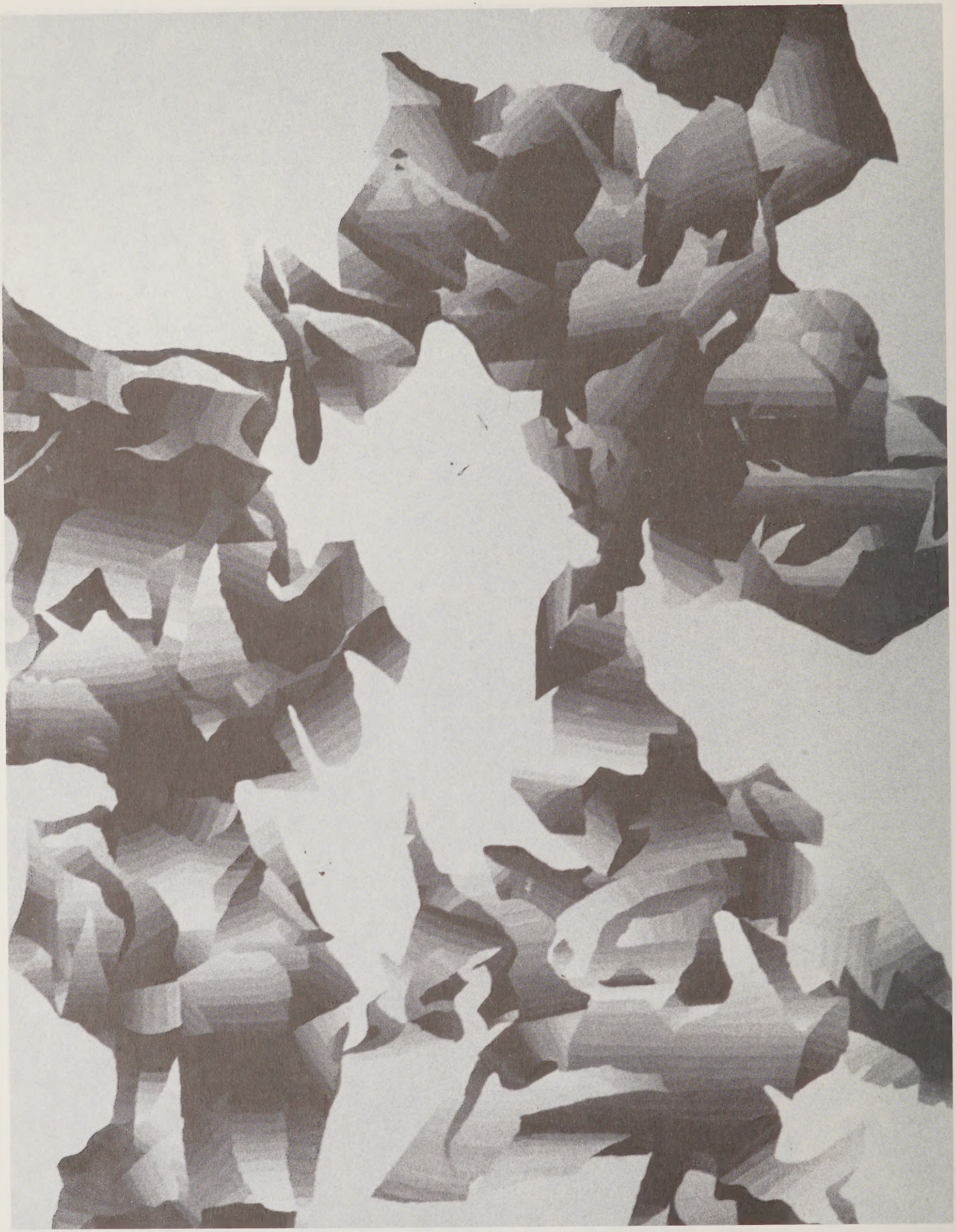


1978 Peace College Literary Magazine--*PRISM*

--Fowler Spencer



--Lisa Crowell

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1st Prize Poetry--

TO MIKE

I tie my own shoes.

Even if they come loose
Even if they tangle

Though you bend and skillfully weave them
A nice, square bow
It doesn't count.

No matter
That each try of mine was retied by you
No matter
That you unlaced me in heat of desire
It doesn't count.

Every morning
I tie my own shoes.

--Paula Dale

2nd Prize Poetry--

THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES

When I see the sea
   it may not be what you saw at all.
For the sea I have seen in one season
   is not the same as the seasons since.
Yesterday my sea was the color of slate
   madly humping the grayish sands.
My sea yesterday, was but a pool
   magnifying my stormy mood.
Your yesterday's sea may be a silvered sheen
   gladly stroking the glittered shores.
But then again, your glimpse of yesterday
   is not only what you saw in the sea
   but what the sea saw in you.

--Candy Clapp

3rd Place Poetry--

TO MY MEMORY MAKER

In the attic
today
I found a hat box.
After blowing off the dust,
I spent my morning hours
folding up our long-gone smiles,
placing them neatly
in the bottom of the box.
Then, one by one,
I packed away
memories we made:
barefoot walks through cornfields on dewy mornings,
Easter egg hunts in Grand-ma's garden,
rainy riverside picnics,
secrets seen in back-seats of hidden cars,
burying ourselves in worn-out blankets
under tall pines.

Memories made through all seasons,
through all seasons four times gone by.
They, the memories,
lay there
hushed,
stagnant.

I put the lid on
tightly,
carefully,
tied a big pink ribbon on top
and gave it to you,
my memory maker,
for a good-bye gift.

You opened it,
saw nothing.
I remember now.
You never could
That's why:
good-
bye.

--Gin Cline

Special Merit Poetry--

OUTER SELF IMAGE BEFORE FALL FELL

Positive moving in rhythm
up the street
wrapped in camel wool
  lined with Pendelton satin
  flared down
   with feet surrounding blue bells.
Not to mention Earth's sending
  posture slant
  gazing from behind a pair
  of sun sensored images . . .
   sparkling
  with moistened lips
  tempting for the adventurous
  magician.
   Going with femine anterior
  made mysterious
  by virgin off-white
  sweatering
  two rounded parts
  of tenderness.
    Like October leaves
  gold rings on
  in my ears
  as well as down
  my own woven wind swaying strands
  of silky splits.
    All of which
    were blown
    back down
    the hill.

--Mary James

YESTERDAY

CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL

Little Chris would ride each day
On his pony, dapple gray,
Out on the plains, deep in the west
To find the place he loved the best.

There the sun shone down on his cattle town
With its streets of dusty gold,
And the buildings were white with a shimmering light,
And the trees were big and old.

His pony's hooves made not a sound
As they lightly touched the familiar ground
On the road that only he had found.

So it was that he would ride
Till dust covered all like a golden tide
And through his thoughts began to seep-
And Chris the cowboy would fall asleep.

--Carol Carney

THE WIND

Runny-nosed child,
Sitting on a park bench.
Wipes nose on a tattered shirt sleeve.
Tears trickle down dirty cheeks,
Tossled blond hair flies in the wind.
Mother jerks him by the hand,
"The trouble....the trouble with these stupid kids...."
She throws the child into a rusting, ancient car,
The pair clunk away.
And the wind still blows.

--Mary Jane Morrow

HOBBLED SOUL

A dignified old barn,
A field of emerald grass,
A deer whose eyes are brown surprise,
Soft streams of golden sun,

I'll find that tranquil glade
Where crickets cut the air,
Where bluebirds' wings of silence sing
And then
        shall
             run.

--Paula Dale

MOMENTO

Brown-edged paper petals
dried and wrinkled;
the odor died with the night.
Only the delicate ribbon remains
of a night
that began with a corsage
of creamy velvet roses
and went on to include
wine, dining, dancing,
and ended with merely
"Thank you." "Good night."

--Sandra Anderson

i looked at you
as you ran through
the rain
you didn't see me
until i tripped over the curb

(couldn't help it)

i came to you
as your shoes needed
to be shined
it wasn't a very good job
but they do look better

(i tried)

as long as you need me
or just need somebody
i can boost your ego
or take the blame for the spilled coke
or wash your car
or call you daily
or . . .

goodbye

my umbrella's wet.

--Sally Hamrick

--Betsy Jones

YESTERDAY

Yesterday we had a dream
we had the world to
ourselves
we had each other.

Today our dream has been broken
Like that wine glass we shared
falling slowly,
slowly
To the floor into thousands of
unforgettable memories.

Tomorrow we will find someone else
Tomorrow we will see each other
on the street
but not a
word
shall be spoken because
our dream was here,
Our dream was shattered; our dream has gone.

--Ruth Battle

OLD ARTIST

Trembling hands are
Gaunt, mottled,
Fingers slipping
He twists the cap
For one last drink.

Yesterday's colors are smudged;
Yesterday's landscapes faded.
Now he paints anger in the smiles of lovers
And death in the eyes of a child.

Paula Dale

MOMMA TRIED FOR FIRST PLACE AT THE QUILTING SHOW

Then,
Momma chose the pattern carefully.
Circles,
Squares,
Rectangles,
Triangles--

Variety.
Momma chose the colors carefully.
Hybrid hues
of harvest gold,
grassy green,
azure blue,
crimson red--

Gaiety.
Now
Menacing moths feast on musty cotton yellowed threads,
unlocking strands of dreams.

Momma made the quilt carefully.
She didn't spray for hungry pests,
'cause she didn't know
where they were
hiding.

--Gin Cline

LETTER HOME

Do you realize
what you did
to make my childhood
worthwhile?
Quietening cries with cookies--
Patching scrapes with Johnson's band-aids
Giving my shiny new tricycles--
and spankings--
well deserved
Explaining why muddy handprints
don't belong on the white house
but--
that don't need to be cleaned
until tomorrow
Ornamenting my closet with
Red dresses, lace socks, patent leather shoes.
Teaching me how to successfully execute
an ice cream cone--

Do you realize
what you did
to make my adolescence
worthwhile?
Quietening cries with caring words--
Repairing scrapes with a pat on the fanny--
Awarding me shiny new bicycles
and time--
to contemplate my wrongdoings--
Being allowed to cross four streets
to reach the awaiting ice cream store
Equipping my closet with
Blue jeans, sweaters, brogans.
Implanting the ability to feel fortunate for "having sufficient"
and not hurting anybody else's sense of worth--

Do you realize
what you did
to make me a young lady?
Quietening cries with reassurance
Mending scrapes with laughter--
Bestowing me shiny new cars
taking the keys
only to be given back
with gas money--
Guiding me as I learned that there is indeed
another gender.
Garnishing my closet with
Plaid skirts, ribbons, silk blouses.
Understanding that being mature is admitting
that you never were before--

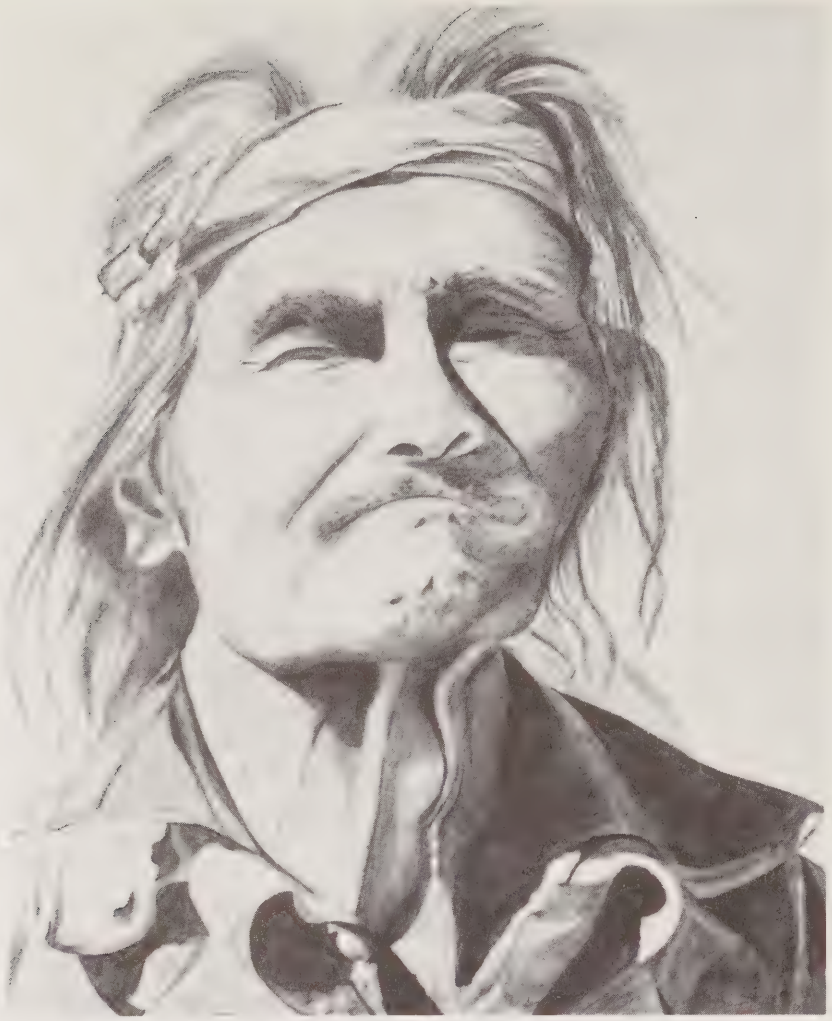
Do you realize
what I am doing
to make myself a woman?
I am quietening my own cries--
I am restoring my own scrapes which
are now inside
rather than on my knees and elbows--
I am setting my own curfews
and spending my own earned dollars--
I am also beginning to wonder
if maybe
a companion may help
make my life more complete--
and if someday
I
can quieten tears with cookies
and clean
the muddy handprints
from the house--

--Sally Hamrick

GREAT AUNT LOIS

We saw her last, rocking
Gently on the porch.
Her faille dress and ivory beads
Worn to church revivals--
The magnolia tree cast shade
On the gingerbread bannister--
Her 1958 white Falcon without a radio
Parked in the gravel driveway--
A white house on the corner,
The papered walls held
A scent of moth balls--
Continuous ticking of a grandfather clock
Echoed in the hall--
A rosy crocheted afghan
Folded neatly on the burgundy sofa--
Yellowed doilies pinned to the arm and headrests--
Pink, floral Victorian lamps
On an antique chest--
Black and white family photographs on the wall--
Hot homemade biscuits and butter
On the red-checked tablecloth.

--Sherry Bond



--Kathy Nobles

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

Death--
You speak to us everyday.
Not just thru Dylan's words,
But thru the words of every individual.
You create the past with words;
So that the past has a future with you.
We are all just walking history books . . .
The story of every individual.
Walking time bombs of ideas and emotions.
One day it explodes--
The future is the present--
The past is no more--
You say "Come"
As you speak to us . . .
Death.
Why didn't we listen sooner?

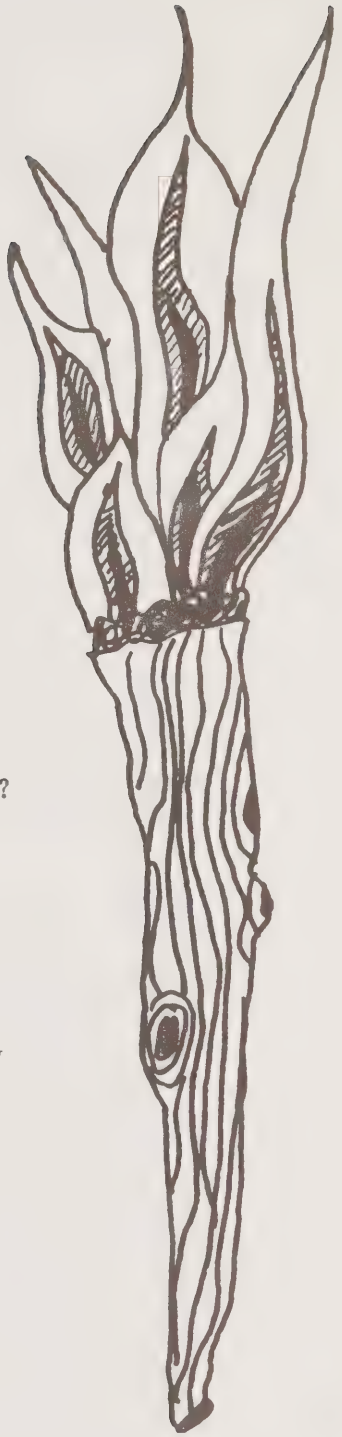
--Beth Robinson

TO MY HIGH SCHOOL IDOL

Ah, the Greek god.
Smile on the masses, Apollo,
With your glowing halo of life,
And the smile of the purest light.
Draped in a cloud of splendor,
You are so good,
We all dream and wish to be like you.

Now you turn to hide your face,
Ashamed of the human tears you shed.
So you've fallen from the sky
Into the pit of human mortality.
Do you shed tears
For misplaced goals?
Or perhaps you cry
Because golden glory was too great an expense.
Were you blind to the fact that clouds grow gray?
You see that life is a hard race to run,
Even harder to win.
The crowd could still lend support
Yet, when the applause is gone,
You give up hope
And waste away in self-pity.

--Mary Jane Morrow



1st Place Fiction--

A TRIP IN TIME

--Amanda Davidson

I quickly took a window seat halfway down the aisle. Looking out, I saw my roommate wave goodbye as she stood by the car, and the lump in my stomach tightened. In my nineteen years, I had never traveled by bus, and I tried to hide my nervousness with sophisticated cool.

I noticed the other passengers as they boarded: tired old clothes, belongings carried in grocery bags, hungry eyes peering from black skin. I found myself praying that no one would take the seat beside me, and thought with sweaty palms how childish it was for me to be nervous.

The ride from Raleigh to Boone would be a long, boring one. By car, it took about four hours. The bus dragged it out to five, but I could take advantage of the opportunity to do some serious thinking. Gazing out the window, I pondered the weekend ahead. Mark had taken a chance by asking me to come, and I was taking an even bigger chance by going. Right when I thought our pride had taken over for good, I got his letter. Through tired tears I read, ". . . one more chance to work things out. I know we have some problems, but isn't our love for each other strong enough to overcome them?" I thought it was, but I was still afraid. I didn't want to ruin our relationship totally by trying to save something that just wasn't there anymore.

Maybe it was too late. There had been so many needless fights and hurt feelings, so many wasted words, only cutting deeper and deeper, until sometimes I wondered if it had ever been worth it. But at those times, all I had to do was think back and remember the weekends when we would lock ourselves away, not seeking anybody else and not caring, just being alone and full of each other and holding each other. So content, so sure of each other, so sure . . . .

I don't know when the trouble began, when things started to go wrong. Mark's grades started to drop, and along with them, his hopes for law school. Maybe subconsciously he blamed me for the grade problem. We had spent a lot of time together, and I guess I did demand too much of him. But the problem went deeper than Mark's resentment against me. My feelings seemed changed, too. It no longer excited me to sit with him and plan our future together. I guess I had to admit that our future didn't sound as glamorous now that Mark's plans were uncertain. I had enjoyed planning my life as a lawyer's wife, and now I honestly wondered if the change would affect how I felt about him, about our marriage. Was it that important to me? Did it even matter?

We decided to break things off for a while to try to think more clearly. But all I could do was sit around feeling lonely, missing Mark.

When I finally got his letter, I was excited and frightened at the same time. Would it be better to wait it out? Or should I confront him, and take a chance at losing it all? I had to know for sure, so I was willing to risk it.

The final passengers were boarding. I especially noted the last one to climb the stairs. He was an elderly white man, around 70. He seemed harmless enough, even grandfatherly, and I offered him a smile as he moved past to take the seat behind me.

I was relieved when the driver climbed on board and took his seat, and as the bus rolled out of the station, I turned back to the window and my thoughts. Moments later, I was startled to sense someone leaning over my shoulder. I turned to find the old man gazing down at me.

His voice was tender. "Hello there. My name's Lawson Bates, mind if I sit by you awhile? I'd like to talk to you."

I studied him as he joined me. His rough tanned face showed a hint of white beard, having missed today's shave. The face was a handsome one that made me guess that he had been very attractive in years gone by. He still had a radiant smile and a twinkle in his eye; age hadn't stolen his charm. He was humbly polite when he said, "These long bus rides can be mightly lonely for an old feller like me. But I don't mean to bother you or nothin'."

"Oh, you're not bothering me," I lied, "I'd like some company myself." Although I really needed to be alone and think, I couldn't turn away an old person who only wanted to talk. I began to tell him about myself when I suddenly noticed him staring at me. He was taking in my whole face, inch by inch. I was so startled that I stopped talking and lowered my eyes, blushing. He immediately began stammering an apology, and appeared more embarrassed than I was. "I'm so sorry, really, I wasn't meaning to be rude, please forgive me. It's just that you remind me very much of someone I once knew, someone very special to me." He looked into my eyes so sincerely that I believed him, and wanted to know more.

"I remind you of somebody?"

"You sure do, Honey." His face glowed as he looked at me, "You look just like my Ruby did when she was your age. Why, if I didn't know better, I'd think you was Ruby's young'un."

He paused for a moment, looking down at his hands, staring into nothing. But from the moment he began to talk of her and of their life toghther, I could sense that he was no ordinary man. His scratchy old voice was rough, but tender. He was so absorbed in what he said that I, too, soon became enchanted with his story. His warm blue eyes were shooting sparks of vivid memory.

"I guess I fell in love with Ruby the first time I saw her. It was 1934, and she wore lilacs in her hair. It was July, and she had on this long, swirling dress that sorta danced when she walked. I'll never forget that day, it was awful hot, July, you know." He paused, remembering, and I hardly noticed the bus rolling down the highway. I leaned closer to him, burning in the heat of 1934.

He had a beardless Santa Claus face. Rosy cheeks set off white hair, but it was the eyes, the clear, honest-blue eyes that showed me the real man. They were the experienced eyes of one that had been places, known people. And they were deep; the sparkle went beyond the surface. I stared at him, hypnotized, and he continued.

"Ruby was seventeen then, and the belle of DeKalb County. Why, she had so many courters that summer, I thought I'd never get a chance to call. But one evening that July, her brother asked her would she see me. She said yes, I could call, and I did. It was that day, that first day in July, 1934, that Ruby floated into the room for the first time; and she wore lilacs in her hair. I guess that's when I fell in love with Ruby. Or maybe it was before. I don't really know."

He twisted a band of gold on his finger as I looked at him, puzzled, and the eyes smiled back at me. He patted my hand, and tried to explain, "I know it's strange, Honey, but sometimes I really believe I was in love with Ruby before I even met her." He stopped, still smiling slightly, knowing I wouldn't understand. "I have feelings. I knew by her house, by the feel of the sofa under me, by the scent of lilacs, I could feel it real deep inside me."

We gazed far into space, silent. His tanned, wrinkled hands trembled slightly as he remembered. Moments later he was talking again, and I returned with him to his past. With a hint of pride in his smile, he continued. "Ruby and I took to each other right off. I'll never understand what Ruby saw in me. But she really thought I was something. I told her about places I had been, and she would always make me promise to take her there." He paused, looking down shyly and picking at a thread in his pants. "Ruby's parents didn't much take to me courting Ruby though. They said that it was because of our age difference, but I suspected that wasn't really it at all. I was only fifteen years older, and that wasn't all that much. I reckon the real reason is because they wanted somebody more to their liking than me. Somebody like Heywood Ratchford III. His daddy owned the biggest saw mill in DeKalb County, and Heywood Ratchford III went to college. They really liked that, and wanted Ruby to get up with him."

Lawson Bates continued to twist the wedding ring around on his finger, never taking his eyes from the shiny gold. "Ruby favored me though," he recalled. "She used to tell me that Heywood wasn't half as interesting to talk to as me, and wasn't any fun at all. Yeah, Ruby liked me. But her folks was getting kinda fed up with it all cause Ruby wanted to spend more time with me than Heywood. So one day when I went over to call on Ruby, her daddy come to the door and said Ruby wouldn't be seeing me no more causing her and Heywood Ratchford was going to be married."

The old man sat in thought, absorbed in his memories. After a moment, he continued, "I kept hoping to get in touch with Ruby but I never did. She was always with her mamma or Heywood Ratchford's mamma or somebody. And I didn't want to show disrespect by approaching a promised girl in public. So I kept shut, even though I could see Ruby's eyes wasn't shining."

Lawson Bates paused; then looked me in the eyes and said, "Here I go, running on so, I should be shot for keeping you like this. I'll go back to my seat and let you alone."

I grabbed his sleeve. "No, please, finish your story. What happened to you and Ruby?"

He smiled brightly, pleased that I was interested in his story. "OK, Honey. But then I'm going to quit bothering you." He sat back down and continued, blue eyes twinkling. "Well, let's see, where was I? Well, Ruby and me went most of a year without talking. I sort of was afraid she might resent me for interfering, seeing how she was marrying into all that Ratchford money and all. So I didn't bother her and I never heard

anything from Ruby by a message or nothing. I just figured if I really loved Ruby the best thing I could do was leave her be and not cause any trouble. And I figured that maybe she'd started to take to old Heywood or something. And I didn't want to butt in.

"Well, it went on like that, us not talking and all, and the only way I ever heard about Ruby was through the newspaper articles in the society page of The DeKalb Bi-Weekly Courier about their parties at the country club. One even had a picture. Heywood Ratchford II and Mrs. Ratchford was honoring their boy Heywood and his future bride at a dinner dance, and the four of them decorated the society page the next day. Ruby had on her white, off-the-shoulder dress and had her hair done up in one of those bun things that was high-society fashion. I never had seen her hair that way before, but there was the lilacs, sure enough, sort of stuck in the back, and while I looked at that picture, I swore I could'a smelled 'em. Heywood was standing beside Ruby, and his hand was touching her elbow. He was standing so tall, and just'a smiling. Ruby's eyes was looking down, and I couldn't tell if she was smiling or not.

"Well, I guess it was the week before the wedding that I started to get nervous. I kept telling myself, 'Now Lawson, if you really love Ruby you'll let her be.' But I knew I couldn't let her be. I loved her. And I couldn't believe she didn't really love me, not the way she'd whispered in the parlor.

"Ruby was to get married that Saturday night at eight o'clock in the Antioch Church, and by supper come Saturday I was in a cold sweat. I took me a shower and put on my grey wool Sunday suit. I got to the church at 'bout quarter to eight, and walked right in the ladies parlor. The smell of lilacs liked to knock me down and I saw Ruby, standing on a white bed sheet in the middle of the room. Alice Fay Crowder, her best friend, was there beside her and looked to faint when she saw me. Ruby looked me straight in the eye when she told Alice Fay to leave the room and keep her mouth shut.

"Alice Fay ran out, pale as a ghost, and Ruby and me was left alone in the room. The air was thick, part from heat, but mostly from nerves. I started to walk to Ruby, real slow-like, not knowing what I'd do when I got there, but she met me halfway. Ruby looked up at me, and said with her sweetest, society-bride manners, 'Let's get the hell out of here.' And that was that. I took her hand and we left the church right then and there, leaving old Heywood Ratchford III waiting at the altar.

"Ruby and I hopped in my car and went straight to the train station. We had to be careful, because of her wedding dress and all, but we got the first train out of town. We didn't even know where we'd end up, but the train pulled into Virginia Beach Station at 4:00 a.m., and we knew it was our stop. We got the name of the probate judge from the station manager and we called him up right away. It 'bout near broke me to pay that judge to come out at five o'clock in the morning, but he finally agreed. He married Ruby and me in the sand right there on the beach while the sun come up over the water."

Lawson Bates sat beside me looking down at his worn leather shoes. I sat in silence beside him, because I couldn't think of anything worth saying. I just stared at him with wonder in my eyes. Finally he turned to me, patted my hand, and went back to the seat behind me.

I sat for a long time thinking about Lawson and Ruby and their story. I guess it was then that a new realization hit me, and I began to look at myself for the first time. Mark was the best thing that had ever happened to me I thought, and I knew I loved him. I could hardly believe that because of my selfish pride I had almost let him slip away. Or was I realizing too late how wrong I had been? I prayed that Mark wouldn't think so.

As I sat looking out the window, Lawson Bates approached me again and took the seat beside me. He pulled a harmonica from his plaid wool shirt. The sun shone down and added brilliance to the silver object as Lawson Bates put it to his lips and began to play. He whipped out "Jimmy Crack Corn" and I didn't care if everyone on the bus could hear, I sang along. He played "Way Down Yonder in the Paw Paw Patch" and "I Been Working on the Railroad," and then got mellower with "The Old Rugged Cross." He played for nearly an hour without stopping, except once to add that, this one always was Ruby's favorite, and I found that the more he played, the dearer he became to me.

When the bus pulled into the station, I said goodbye to Lawson Bates, and fought back tears for a stranger, who suddenly seemed more to me like a dear, close friend. I kissed his bristly, old cheek goodbye.

Then I turned and through the window I could see Mark sitting on a bench with a bunch of hand-picked mountain lilacs, wrapped in foil, waiting especially for me.

* * * * *

CHOO-CHOO!

Blowin' my whistle to tell you I'm back
Southern is a-wheeling' down the track,
Stoppin' to chat with a dear old friend
Then puffin' it up, here I go again!

Station to station I run my laps
Varyin' speeds, roarin' through gaps,
Amazin' small boys who delight in my size
Tourin' the country and wearin' old ties.

--Margaret Britt

--Kathy Nobles

OLYMPIC OUTCOME

Four years caked in a Zeus infatuation
drenched in New England syrup dreams and Neil Young lyrics.
This deity shellacked my brain,
brush filled with invisible paint,
that didn't begin fading
until the American entered the Marathon
uniformed in Himself
breaking Zeus's record
which had been Hand-packed
in a plastic film
of Fakeness.

--Candy Clapp

2nd Place Fiction--

COUSINS

--Carol Carney

For what was,
Might have been,
And still remains.

What can you say about cousins? Everybody's got a few. Cousins can be a lot of fun--at least that's what my younger sister, Wendy, and I decided about ours. Of course, we had our favorite cousins, CJ and Phillip, and although the four of us didn't see one another more than two or three times a year, we managed to grow close and eventually think of each other more as being best friends than anything else.

It wasn't always like that. I can remember Christmas spent at our grandparents' house when I was in about the third grade when those two would avoid Wendy and me like the plague. Being boys, they were convinced that all girls had "cooties," and the fact that we were cousins didn't make any difference. Of course, there being very little age difference between the four of us--one year between CJ and me and not quite that much between my sister and Phillip--as girls, Wendy and I felt that boys weren't worth catching "cooties" from, either. So it went for two, maybe three years--an understood system of mutual ignoring.

After that period, though, we all began to enjoy each other's company. Whenever we got together we'd head for the great outdoors, looking for adventure and challenge. We'd play hide-and-go-seek in the dark, freeze tag, hold our annual "cousins vs. cousins" basketball game, scream, shout, and sometimes get in trouble. I remember one year when Phillip and CJ got spankings and had to sit by themselves in a room for scaring Wendy and me really bad. Phillip cried for two hours, but I never heard a sound from CJ. My aunt had told me that he wouldn't cry so he got it twice as hard. That was CJ all right. I'd hated him for at least half an hour.

It wasn't until the summer before sixth grade that I really grew close to CJ, and vice versa. That year the cousins came during a virtual monsoon, so we four kids had to sit in the basement for three days and play games. Checkers, Parchesi, marbles on the carpet, Old Maid--you name it and we played it six, seven, eight times a day.

Naturally, since I was older than Wendy and Phillip by two years and CJ was by three, we two got to stay up forty-five minutes later than they did. I remember when CJ and I had our first real talk, although at that time it didn't seem like much. It was the first day the cousins had spent at my house that visit, and I had noticed that CJ was quieter and more to

himself than usual. We were in the basement playing crazy-eights, and Wendy and Phillip had gone to bed.

"Diamonds," I said as I put my eight of spades down on the sliding pile of cards; "gotcha now, don't I?" Looking at his hand and wrinkling his forehead with thought, CJ sniffed and put down a two of diamonds. "Lucky!" I said, putting a six on top of it.

Waiting for him to make his play, I leaned against the sofa and stretched my legs a bit. "What time is it?" I asked.

"Almost 9:15," CJ said. "Let's hurry--I've only got fifteen minutes left to smear you!" Another five minutes, and CJ began to doubt that he would win after all; he decided to start a conversation.

"Remember my friend Joey Kirby, that kid with the basketball autographed by the whole Maryland State team?"

Trying to concentrate on my none-too-good hand, I mumbled an irritable "Yes."

"He smokes cigarettes," CJ said quietly so nobody upstairs could hear.

Figuring that this discussion could be more exciting than playing cards, I looked over at CJ with genuine interest. "Really?" I asked. "Where does he get them?"

"Oh, his parents give 'em to him," CJ said. "They say that seventh grade is old enough."

My curiosity building, I asked the ultimate question. "Have you ever smoked, CJ?"

Leaning forward a little, CJ crossed his arms and grinned at me. "Sure I have," he said, "lots of times."

"What if your mom and dad found out," I asked with mixed concern and admiration. "Mine would kill me if I started smoking."

"You're still a kid," CJ replied coolly, shaking his hair from his eyes, "and anyway, I decided to quit last week."

"Oh, I've heard it's real hard to quit," I whispered with excitement. "What made you do it, CJ? Was it bad?" Looking somewhat disturbed, CJ uncrossed his arms and looked at me. "Well?" I said.

"Naw, it wasn't that bad," he answered, looking down. "I only did it for a few weeks anyway."

"Uh-huh! Why'd you quit, CJ?" I pried. "You got caught, didn't you? That's why you quit, I bet!"

I caught the bright blue flash of CJ's eyes as he looked up at me sharply. "Look," he said slowly, "you're still a kid. You wouldn't understand. If I told you, you wouldn't understand."

"Please?" I begged. "Please, CJ, I'm only a year younger than you--pretty please?"

Sighing, CJ pulled his knees to his chin and sat still for a moment. Then, throwing down his cards, he began. "It just wasn't me," he said quietly, more to himself than to me. "It wasn't me at all." Glancing over to be sure I wasn't laughing at him, CJ continued. "It doesn't taste too bad once you get used to it, but I wasn't smoking because I liked it. I like Joey and his group for sure, and they smoked so I did too. But I didn't like it so I quit. And I don't hang around with Joey and them much anymore because I don't 'fit in.' I only smoked to fit in and be somebody I wasn't." Looking up at me, so serious I almost jumped, CJ tried to smile. "Understand, kid?"

I replied that of course I understood, and would've told him off for calling me "kid," but at that moment my aunt called and CJ jumped up and

made a dash for the steps, leaving me to pick up the cards and figure out just what he had meant by all that. Before he reached the top step, he stopped, turned and looked at me for a minute. "Thanks for listening and trying to understand," he said quietly. "I feel a lot better to get it off my chest." And with that he bounded up the remaining steps, turned the corner, and was gone.

The next night and the night after that were spent in virtually the same way, except that CJ kept things on my level, as he put it. We talked about problems with parents, younger siblings, romance, and arithmetic, both of us feeling a little better to know that we weren't alone. In those two nights, I learned more about CJ than I'd learned ever since I'd known him, but that knowledge didn't go the extent of making either of us feel uncomfortable. After each talk we'd swear to secrecy, and that was it.

The cousins left that summer and didn't come back to visit again until Christmas. Even then, they stayed only two days, and I had the flu and couldn't play or get close to them. They flew paper airplane notes at me from my door as I lay in my bed, thermometer in mouth, until my aunt found out and made them quit bothering me. They left for Maryland without my even saying more than three paragraphs to either one of them, and since we were unable to get together for Easter the next year, I didn't see them again until fall. By that time I was in the seventh grade, and determined to out-mature CJ if it was the last thing I did.

They arrived on a mid-afternoon during Thanksgiving vacation. We all sized one another up: Phillip's blonde hair had gotten darker, and both he and CJ had grown surprisingly fast; Wendy had supposedly gotten shorter; I'd gotten dumber, and so on. After arguing over just who had gotten dumber, and who was dumber, girls or boys, we decided to settle our differences in a fair, democratic way.

It was the annual cousins vs. cousins basketball game, of course. Although we generally played it in the summer, we decided that an exception could be made since we'd not seen each other since last Christmas. Grabbing the ball, we charged out into the backyard, Wendy and I swearing we'd win, and CJ and Phillip vowing they'd kill us.

Quickly we got some rakes from the brick shed, raked clear our dirt court, and prepared to play. Rolling up the sleeves of my blue turtleneck sweater and putting my hair back in a rubber band, I picked up the ball, dribbled it a minute, and started our usual pre-game warm-up. Without a word of warning I passed the ball to CJ who quickly basketed it without any difficulties. Phillip recovered the ball in a second and passed it to Wendy, who took it backcourt and waited to see whose ball it would be first. Reaching into his pocket, CJ withdrew a nickle and elected Wendy and Phillip to call for it. Wendy guessed "heads," won, and so our team was given first possession. We were to play to fourteen, and, as usual, almost anything went.

After we'd been playing for about half an hour, the cousins started to tire, and Wendy and I got ahead. Every time one of the guys got the ball, something would happen that would cause him to lose it, giving one of us girls the chance to score. Finally, CJ realized that he might lose to us yet another year and began to try harder, employing all the techniques he'd learned on a team and encouraging Phillip to try harder.

"Come on, come on, come on," CJ shouted as the basketball neatly bounded between Phillip's legs, "we've gotta hustle, boy; these two girls aren't going to get the best of us!" Dodging Phillip's half-hearted guard, Wendy easily swished another two points for our team.

Recovering the ball, which had rolled under the rusty sliding board, and tossing it to Phillip, CJ brushed his dark hair from his eyes and, squinting, surveyed the court for possible maneuvers. "Hey," he yelled over to Phillip, who stood behind the raked row of leaves and pine needles representing our 'out-of-bounds' line, "throw it in good," and then to Wendy and me he added with a grin, "free throw!" Phillip threw the ball straight in to CJ, who turned to take it up court, tripped over a newly fallen pine cone, fumbled, and, as usual, lost it to Wendy (the undisputed fifth-grade basketball champion), who made a perfect shot from the foul line. Despite their efforts, the boys watched as the annual cousins vs. cousins game went the same as always.

Moaning with exaggerated agony, CJ plopped himself in the middle of the court. "Oh the unfairness of it all," he wailed, shaking his fist at the house, yard, and trees. "Where is the justice in this world?" Laughing, Wendy, Phillip, and I joined him on the ground and attempted to catch our breath. We always played hard when we got together, and with the cousins' playing having improved since the last game, Wendy and I were having to work twice as hard as usual to keep ahead. "I just don't get it," CJ said, examining the pinecone that led to his downfall, "I just don't get it. Here I am on the Gaithersburg Junior High basketball team, and here's Phillip who's taller than some guys my age, and we're letting two dumb girls smear us!" Clasping his fist to the heart of his "Gaithersburg Giants number 22" sweatshirt, CJ grimaced with imaginary pain. "Can anyone explain this gross injustice?" Almost simultaneously Wendy and I volunteered our answers. "We're better," we said. Hurling his pinecone at us in mock anger and bursting into laughter, CJ got up and motioned to Phillip to get the ball.

Before Wendy or I knew what was going on, Phillip threw the ball to CJ who, too quick for us to catch, dunked it in the basket with a whoop of victory. Breathing hard, blue eyes sparkling with mischief, CJ leaned against the tree under the backboard, put his hands in his pockets and swung his hair from his eyes with one quick, easy shake of his head. "Well, well," he said to Wendy and me with enthusiasm, "what do you think of that?" "Well done, for once," Wendy retorted, "but it's our ball now." I raced over to recover the ball (hiding behind my rusty blue bicycle) and threw it in to Wendy. Catching it with ease, Wendy took the ball backcourt, evaded Phillip's lanky guard, and threw it to me. Darting around CJ, I managed to score with a left-handed lay-up before they realized what had happened. Another fifteen minutes of bumbles, collisions, fouls--tackling, tickling, and tripping--and a bit of scoring, and the game was over. As usual, we girls had indeed won.

When Wendy and I had ended our victory screams and dances and had begun to settle down a bit, CJ cleared his throat loudly. "All right, sports fans," he said in his best Howard Cosell voice, "the annual cousins vs. cousins game ends with a final score of fourteen to twelve." "How about fourteen to ten," I corrected, "and in our favor?" Needling, Wendy began to push our luck. "Don't you want to play again?" she asked innocently? "Surely you guys aren't ready to quit just because you lost to two 'dumb girls' by four measly points." "Surely not," CJ answered coolly, though his eyes were smouldering. Slyly glancing at Phillip, who had the ball and nodded back, CJ leapt up shouting, "nor are we losing by four!" raced past Wendy and me, intercepted the ball thrown by Phillip and chunked it in the basket twice before Wendy and I could reach him.

"Like I said," CJ stated, trying to look dignified as he brushed from his hair the leaves and pine needles that Wendy and I ground in when we'd finally caught him, "the final score is fourteen to fourteen--OUR favor."

After dinner that night, all of us went outside to where Dad had built a fire, and toasted marshmallows. Mom and Aunt Ritey came out and talked about health and nutrition until they got cold and went inside, and Dad and Uncle Jim went in a while after them to discuss the latest discoveries in photography. We kids stayed outside and told ghost stories and ate gooey marshmallows until we felt sick, and when Wendy and Phillip were called in, CJ and I decided to remain by the dying fire and talk until we had to go in ourselves. Picking up leaves and sticks within our reach, we lazily fed the weakening flames. I sat waiting for CJ to make jokes or a wise remark, but he didn't say anything. He just leaned against the tree by the fire and didn't say a word.

"Okay, what's wrong?" I asked, remembering that he had been quiet like that when he'd visited the last summer and was so disturbed about his friends. "Come on," I said, "you can tell me, CJ, you know that." Smiling to himself, CJ didn't look up or even move, but answered quietly, "I know."

I waited a few minutes and then went over to where he sat and didn't say anything either. We sat there for a while, looking at the fire, and I was really beginning to worry, until CJ finally spoke up. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" he asked.

Somewhat relieved, I answered quickly. "Oh, a stewardess, an archaeologist--maybe a teacher--it depends."

Waiting for him to get to the point of the question, I asked him the same. CJ didn't answer for a while, and I was about to ask him again in case he hadn't heard me, when he slowly replied, "I don't know. I've never even thought about it." So much for that, I thought to myself, and picking up a pine cone, I hurled it into the fire. As it hit, the pine cone sent millions of tiny, burning sparks to drift slowly down, each dying out before it touched the ground.

"Do you believe in God?" CJ asked.

Startled and embarrassed that he'd ask something like that, I replied an irritated, "yeah, sure, doesn't everybody?"

CJ sighed and thought for a minute. "No, no, that's not what I meant. Sure, I know you believe in God, but, like, what do you believe?"

All of my Sunday School lessons came rushing into my head--the Lord's Prayer, what words I'd memorized from the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments, all moving with such incredible speed that I couldn't really say exactly what I believed. "I . . . I guess I believe in the Triune God and all that stuff," I said, blushing and feeling very angry with CJ for making me feel so uncomfortable, "and in Christmas and Easter . . . that we're forgiven for sins and get to go to Heaven--that's about it. You know your religion as well as I do; we're both Lutheran." I waited for a reply, and when none came, I continued. "You do believe, don't you, CJ? I know you go to church and all. You have to believe, CJ, don't you?"

This time CJ looked up and smiled. "Sure, I believe, and just what you do, dumb girl." He paused, leaned toward the warmth of the flames, and continued. "It's God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit and Christmas and Easter and if you believe when you die, there's life forever." He picked up a pine cone by his foot and, as I had done, threw it into the now-smouldering fire and watched the sparks burn down to the ground again.

"Ashes to ashes!" I said cheerfully, hoping to change the subject. Smiling, CJ turned and hit me on the arm, almost knocking me over. Recovering my balance, I leaned toward the hot ashes and rubbed my palms together. "Let's talk about something else," I said. "I don't like to talk about God

and dying at all; it gives me the jitters. Like any minute the devil himself will come out from behind a tree and grab us!"

CJ found this amusing and, trying to scare me more (and succeeding), began to speak in a hushed, evil-sounding voice. "I can see it now," he said, as if in a trance. "Here sits a poor dumb girl, surrounded by darkness and all alone by a dying fire--suddenly a wind comes up, scattering the ashes, branches, and leaves crashing from the trees--and a voice moans in the wind itself, 'come with me, it's your turn, dearest!'"

"Oh, cut it out, CJ," I practically shouted at him, shivering, but not from the cold. "I'm going inside if you don't just shut up and leave me alone." I was furious! First he asked me about religion and embarrassed me, and now he was really scaring me to death on purpose.

Death and the devil had scared me ever since I was three and a babysitter let me stay up and watch a late movie with her. When, after the movie was about half over, I'd gotten absolutely hysterical from fright, the sitter locked me in my dark room so she could finish watching it in peace. There was no light that I could reach, and no way out. Branches on the tree outside my room scratched on my storm window, casting dancing shadows across my bed where I sat, huddled in sheer fright, listening to the screams from the television in the other room. I'd never told anybody about it and didn't think I ever would, but I found myself still to be unreasonably afraid of death.

"Hey, kid," CJ said in real surprise, "you're really scared, aren't you? Look," he reasoned, trying to get me calmed down, "the devil's nowhere around--you know that! I just don't know why you're acting so strange. What's wrong?" On the verge of tears I found myself blurting out to CJ that secret that I'd kept so long. I must've talked for five minutes, maybe more, before I stopped and, utterly confused, hit the ground with my fist. "I don't know, CJ!" I shouted up at the trees, "maybe I'm crazy. I don't know what's wrong with me!"

Sighing deeply, CJ pulled his knees to his chin and waited for a moment, listening to the stillness of the night that surrounded us. "Nothing," he siad, "nothing. Everybody's a little scared of death, sure, that's normal." Blankly staring at him I didn't comment and he continued. "Sure, that sitter had problems, doing that to a poor little kid, and it's normal to remember it. Nothing wrong with you at all."

"But CJ," I said, "it doesn't scare everybody as much as it does me. I know it doesn't. Sometimes I'll sit in my room and wonder when I'll die, and I don't want to, not ever, CJ, ever."

"Nobody ever wants to die," CJ said quietly." "It's a matter of accepting it, though. I thought about it a lot when my best friend's father died. We're all going to die sometime. You'll die sometime, too, but it's not all that bad. I don't think it will be. More like sleeping than anything else, you know?"

"See," I said, "see? It doesn't scare you. You never sit and think about it like I do."

"Look," CJ said, starting to run out of patience, "you had a bad experience. You learn from bad experiences."

Just then my mother called us to come inside. "Just a minute," CJ shouted, and then resumed where he'd left off. "What you're doing is dramatizing everything. You're trying to understand something that nobody can understand, and, since you're not getting anywhere with it, you're making it out to be worse than it is. Don't give me any self-pitying mess. I

think about death, too, but I'm not obsessed with it because I know that I can accept it."

Mother called again. "In a minute!" CJ shouted as Mother angrily slammed the kitchen door. Turning to me he grinned and threw up his arms. "Okay, that's it. Lecture done with. Over. Let's get out of here."

Kicking dirt over the now-burned-out ashes, we got up and walked to the house. My mother met us at the door, angry that we hadn't come the first time she'd called, and CJ immediately began to cool her off, telling her a joke about three guys stranded in a desert.

"You should grow up to be either a preacher or a swindler," I said to CJ as we climbed the stairs toward our rooms.

"Point, old chap!" he replied cheerfully. "I get your message loud and clear. Got carried away, huh?" Grinning at him I turned and started to enter my room. "Sometimes I do that," he said with a poorly hidden sigh, "sometimes it's like there's so much to say and I'm afraid I'll never get to say it all."

During the next two days the cousins spent at my house, CJ and I didn't talk about anything as we had that one night. It was as if we'd said about everything we wanted to, and could enjoy being happy, carefree kids again. We decided to hold a re-match of our annual game, and it turned out to be an actual tie for the first time in history. We went exploring in the woods and found an old, abandoned tree house which we immediately claimed, carving our names and ages in the wood and dating it for future reference. We engaged in painful but exciting pine cone fights and, of course, our usual battle of wits, with nobody ever keeping track of who-won-what and not really caring.

All too soon the time came when CJ and Phillip had to leave, and walking down the driveway, Wendy and I were thinking up all the smart things to say that we could. Playfully ignoring us, the cousins got in the packed-up car and rolled down their windows for the usual last-minute battles. But instead of trading insults, they just sat there, not saying a word. Finally, Wendy walked up to the window next to CJ and put her hands on her hips. "Okay, you two. What's up? Where are the old insults, the cuts, burns, etc.? What's going on? Spit it out!"

Turning slowly to Phillip, CJ responded coolly, "How immature a thing to do--trade insults indeed! Shocking, absolutely shocking!"

Phillip answered slowly, trying not to laugh. "My dears," he said innocently, leaning toward the window slowly, "insults are kid stuff!" Something told me that I'd been that route before, and I managed to jump backwards, nearly tripping over a rose garden, to dodge three water balloons as they landed with a splat where I had been standing. Wendy, who hadn't gotten out of the way in time, stood a short distance away from the car, sputtering and dripping and laughing all at the same time.

"You make a good team," I yelled, "but not good enough." My uncle, who had hidden the balloons in the car for them in the first place, turned around and looked at the boys. "I guess she's got you there, boys," he said with a wink. "She outsmarted you both." "Well," CJ said, I know when I've been licked." Waving, I had just turned to go inside when CJ called, "Hey, you!" and I swung around to see what he wanted just in time to get hit with a green water balloon, impacting with enough force to thoroughly soak my jeans, shirt and hair. "This team thinks of everything!" CJ shouted over the hysterical laughter of everyone in the car, my parents and Wendy. "Try it some day!"

Laughing myself and wiping my wet hair from my eyes, I madly waved goodbye as the car eased down the driveway and out onto the street. "Goodbye!" I yelled. "See you at Christmas or next year!"

"Whenever," CJ shouted back as the car rolled down the street and out of sight, "Whenever."

It was a cold, bleak February day, cold and rather cloudy-gray, the naked trees showing no hope of spring. I stepped off the crowded school bus, waved goodbye to my friends, and started walking up my street. I could just make out the top of the house and the driveway when it hit me that something was different. I looked hard and saw that my grandparents' car was there, and my father's was parked in front of it. My grandparents! They only came to visit once a year, if that often, and never in the winter. And what was my father doing home from work so early? Something was wrong. Walking extra fast, I rounded the corner near my house and stopped. There were people in the yard--Granny, Grandpa, Mom, Dad and Wendy. Heart racing, I made my way across the drive and ran up to them.

Wendy's eyes were wet and swollen and her cheeks were a shiny tear-streaked pink when she turned to me. "Oh, Carol," she whimpered. "It's CJ--"

A shock ran through me and I stood staring, unable to breathe as Wendy burst into tears. My mother walked quickly over and hugged her tightly, looking at me and biting her lip to keep from crying herself. "CJ?" I said in disbelief, "CJ?" Nodding and fighting back tears, Mother looked down at Wendy, who was choking now in body-shaking sobs, and over to the car where my father and grandparents stood with their luggage. I touched Mother's arm softly, attempted to say something, failed, and in a daze walked to where my father and grandfather were solemnly talking.

"Dad," I said, feeling sick to my stomach and a bit dizzy, "CJ? What happened?"

"He was running track," he said in a hushed voice. "They say it was his heart."

"His heart?" I almost whispered, "but . . . Grandpa!" I said suddenly, looking up at my grandfather, hoping he would tell me it was all a joke--but at the same time knowing that it wasn't.

The face that looked down at me looked older than it had the last time I'd seen it, and the blue eyes that were always filled with laughter were instead filled with tears. When he spoke, his voice was cracked and unstable. "He was so young--too young. Not much older than you--just a child." My grandmother took his hand and squeezed it, looking at me all the time, as if she knew exactly how I was feeling and what I was thinking. Finally I looked down uncomfortably; she smiled weakly and pulled her old coat tighter over her shoulders. My head was spinning and I could hear Dad and Grandpa mumbling something about a funeral.

I shivered. The wind was blowing chill and icy through the trees, and looking up at the house I suddenly felt that I had to get away; to be alone. Everything--my family, the tears, yes, even the cold--was too much. I felt like a swimmer who dives too deep and runs out of air before he reaches the surface, frantically fighting his way up through the water, seeing the light above him but just beyond his reach, and knowing with every lung-bursting stroke that if he can get to that distant surface, he will find the air that he so desperately needs.

"You're shivering," my grandmother said.

"I know," I said, trying to think clearly. "I think I'll go inside for a while," and I turned and hurried toward the house.

CJ! Once inside, I sat in the living room, rocking back and forth. I could see him--dark hair tangled over quick blue eyes, exuberant, full of energy--just plain happy. Hugging a pillow, I sighed and shut my eyes. He'd had a knack for being happy, or maybe just finding happiness in little, simple things. Biting my lip, I thought hard, remembering everything we'd ever talked or dreamed about--the games, the battle of wits, the quiet final talk by the fire that crisp November night.

No, I wouldn't cry. I threw the pillow across the room and onto the sofa. I wouldn't cry. CJ wouldn't have cried; he knew who he was and where he was going. I'd not cry, and somehow CJ would know it.

He'd taught me about life, if a fifteen-year-old boy can know anything about life. And honesty, too. He had said many times to "be yourself." (Be yourself, in this messed-up world?) And death? Yes, even death. He'd taught me quite a bit, that kid with the unlimited reservoir of humor, and, in many ways, wisdom beyond his years.

Shutting my eyes, I sighed deeply. Then, leaning forward, I looked out the huge bay window and into the front yard. Dad was putting my grandparents' luggage in the trunk of his car and Mother was tying a scarf around her hair. Wendy was standing silently, watching. I pushed myself out of the rocking chair and walked over to the door. The cold air struck me as I stepped outside, and I softly closed the door and walked over to where Wendy stood.

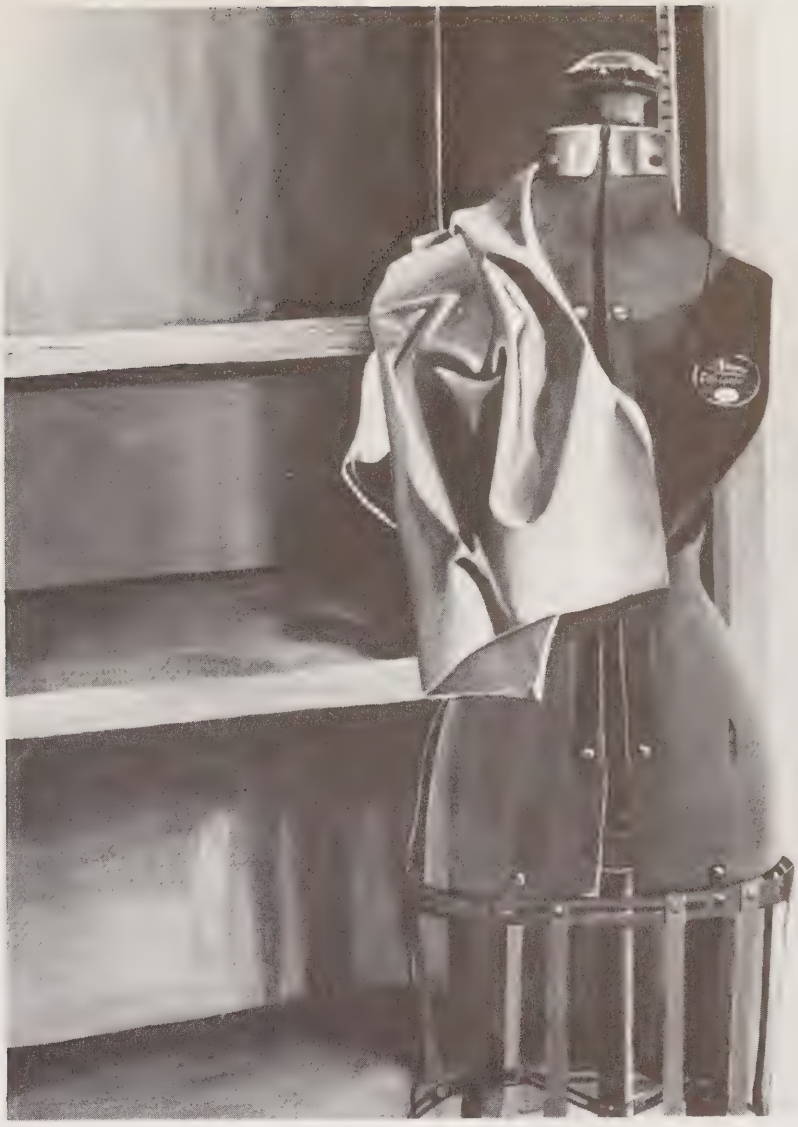
"Come on inside," I said to her quietly. "I'll fix us some hot chocolate with marshmallows." And arms around one another, we slowly walked up the driveway and to the house.

* * * * *

And on fresh mornings like
This one, crisp as toast
Through the cracked opened window
I can hear birds gossiping and
Lawn mowers chugging and straining.
And the sun comes
Through my shades wrapping
Her arms around my neck and
Her fragance is a tangy scent
Of fresh cut grass and
Of laundry hung on the lines to dry.

--Jacquelyn Baron

TODAY



--Kathy Nobles

TAFFETA

The kiss,
Caress
Of rustling crimson dress
Sliding smooth along slender thighs:
Ecstacy of a thousand sighs.

--Paula Dale

PORTRAIT OF A MOTHER

Like a stained glass window,
Throughout my life you add
Brightness on gloomy days,
Blocking out bitterness.
Pure sunlight penetrating,
Rays of light distorted.
Lavender and persimmon intertwine
Fanning in different directions,
Slick and smooth to touch.

--Sherry Bond

TENTH REUNION

Ten years cycled
belly-flop little green toad.
Look at Lovely Lisa
lonely, losing, love
blonde baby doll
sitting in the corner
priced too high
hop on by, little green toad.
Mean, Moving, Mary
mopes in moonlight
tough little bitch
fought one too many
black-eyed beast
leap forward little green toad.
Poor, Pityful, Patty
mow owns three
ugly rag muppet
dancing in the stars
bargains pay well
take a long look, little green toad
cycled by ten.

--Candy Clapp

THE ANGEL

When I fly
I pretend I'm an angel
High above the earth in my
Blue and white utopia.
With white prairies of whipped smoothness
And crests and ledges upon which
I may perch.

I AM the Angel
Up in the air with a reserved few;
This is our domain, new and undisturbed.
Above us is clear, blue sky and
Infinitely, God.

--Margaret Britt

Memories of a life
    yet-lived
Dreams of a shattered
    rainbow
Laughter in a
    sound-proof booth
Tears of solitude
A crowded room
    now empty
        from a cry never heard
        from a door never opened
        from a lifeless death.

--Sara Brown

THE DRIBBLE CASTLE

A dark grey outline
The possible abode of a fiddler crab;
Standing close to the blue-green sea
Presenting sublimity for all.

Towers rise above water's edge
An exclamation in architecture!
Dripping design is its theme
And the ocean its destroyer.

--Margaret Britt

THE BLUSH

The January wind slapped my cheeks as
I hurried to the car.
I was driving to see you.
"Come in," you said
and I did--with read, smarting cheeks.

Sitting by the whispering fire, your touch,
warm and gentle,
Kept my chapped smile from cracking--
The warmth was just enough for a blissful blush.

How I hate to leave and return to the chill
of lonely winter.

--Marianne Harbison

--Lisa Crowell

AN ALARMING EXPERIENCE

The trifling ticking from time to time
Flutters my memory, clutters my mind.
Tick, tick breaks through my tumbling sleep
Frivilous floundering two inches deep.

Sleep trickles the tick-tick to distant faint shades
I float amidst clouds and then start to fade.
Rich, rapid racing of rare rankling sound,
The shrill brings me tumbling back down to the ground.

--Kim Lennon

THE BATTLE WITH BACH

Leering at me constantly
Ivory teeth shine from side to side
Waiting patiently for the next victim
Somehow I feel imprisoned
The timer ticks for thirty minutes
Fingers glued and foot stuck
Producing beats that have no rhythm
Daring black notes that stare
It's impossible that All Cows Eat Grass
Or that Every Good Boy Does Fine!

--Sherry Bond

HELLISH

One child
wandering in the rain
trying desperately
to find her way
out of a maze
of muddy puddles.

--Margaret Britt

HAVEN'T I LOVED YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE?

Haven't I played with you somewhere before?
on the beach in the morning with
sunshine guarding
our blond little heads and
loud birds screaming that the day belonged
to us.
tireless running
sand between our toes.
ebb tide teasing with its cold lapping tongue.
you fell and you scraped and
I cried at the sight
of sand on knees with a
background of blood
but you didn't even whimper.
You always could stand up to pain.
Haven't I danced with you somewhere before?
under dimly colored lights that
gently kissed your hair
as I looked so up at you
from cinderella pumps
I calmly tried to balance
it was hard to maintain
my poise on your arm
as we waltzed off the floor.
Remember the swish of
each swaying step
as my skirts sashayed
in your shadow?
And you offered me punch
and I shyly accepted
sipping the sour
sweetly from the side
of the clear crystal cup
and, forcing back a pucker,
I substituted a smile.

As the evening danced on
you finally took my hand
and you held it very tightly
finger laced with finger
over very sweaty palms.

And I wore a gardenia corsage that your mother had made.

Haven't I left you somewhere before?
on an autumn Sunday morning
in my driveway by your car.
The sharp wind chilled us
as we whispered words of promise
that would soothe the cloudy day.
And we knew it wouldn't matter
if our zip codes would be different
or we'd cheer for different teams
because our hearts could not be separate.

And you caught a tear on my cheek with your finger.

Haven't I hurt you somewhere before?
in a very careful moment of reunion and regret
as we sat in my living room
and smelled the turkey roasting
we both knew clearly that
one of us had changed and
your place at our table
wouldn't set well anymore.
we gazed down awkwardly
and eyes that once had hypnotized
now purposely avoided.

And I walked you to the door although you must have known the way.

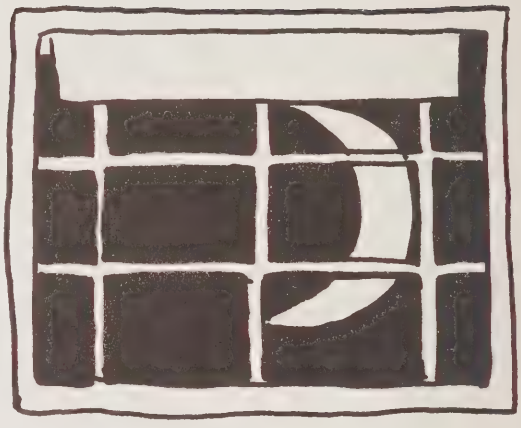
Haven't I passed you somewhere before?
on the street by the drugstore
your arms full of packages
my mind racing rapidly

I watched you pace toward me
long legs striding
you wore the green cardigan
I gave you last Christmas
only a year ago
we spent this time together
we bought a little spruce tree
for my grandmother--
did you read in the paper?
she died last spring
she asked me about you on her
very last day.

And we didn't even speak as we passed.

Haven't I longed for you somewhere before?
so ever late at night
with a crescent mooning
black velvet sky casting
darkening shadows.
An ever lonely room
holds a large double bed
that only sleeps single.

As I catch a tear on my cheek with my finger.



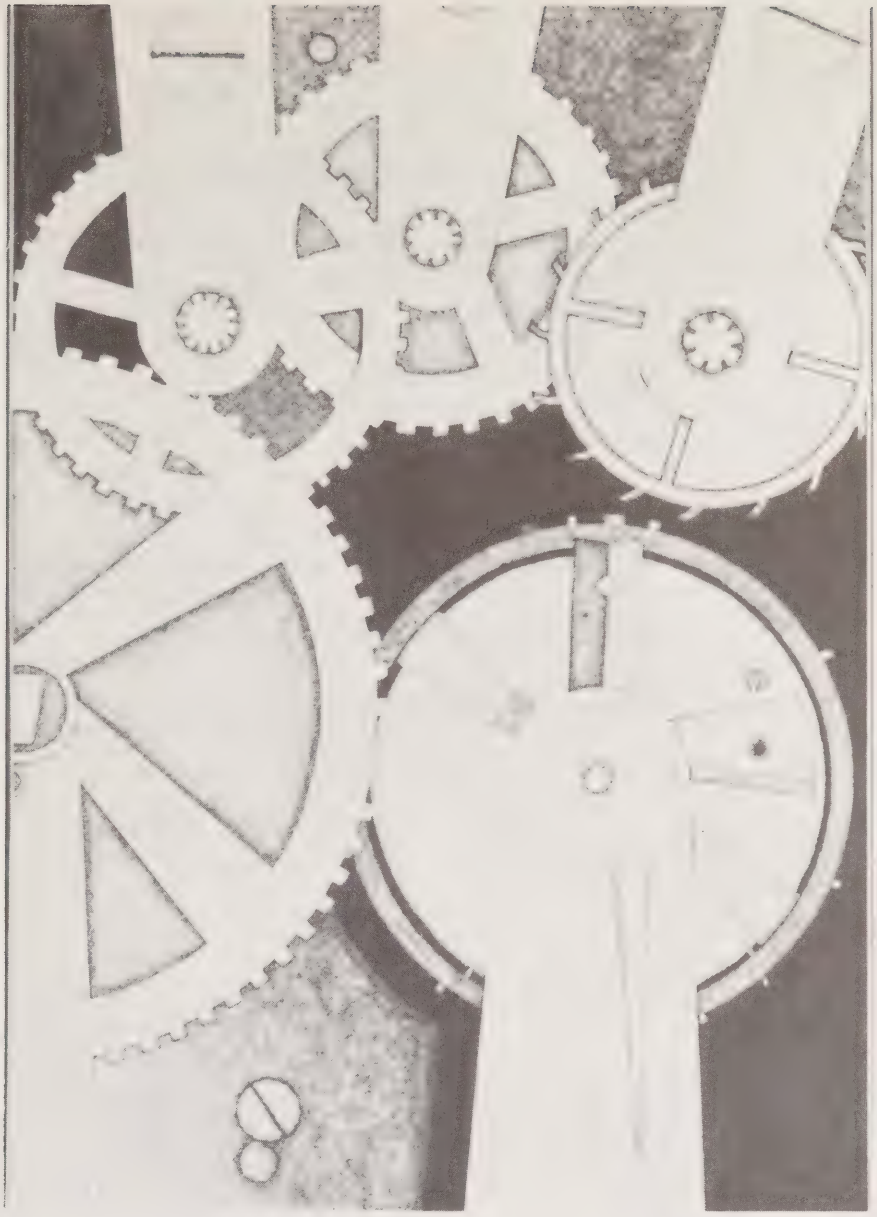
--Amanda Davidson

THE ART OF SURFING

Go for it!
Lay down
Put your face on the side of it
Stand up
Arch your back
Throw your hands up
Touch the sun
There it is--
HOLLOW . . .
All your answers are at the end
So go for it!

--Beth Robinson

TOMORROW



CONFUSION

--Betsy Jones

Which way to turn--I don't
know
What to do, or where to go,
Decisions, questions--I can't
figure out.
Why don't I know what its
about?
Circles are turning around and around
I don't know which end is
up or which is down.
The balls continue to bounce
And the cookies crumble.
Everything in my mind
is one giant jumble
Of total confusion.

--Denise Stover

FORECAST OF FEELINGS

Suspending like frozen finger-like phantoms--
Thoughts like ice--
Chilled, crisp,
     like new snow.
Your face so rigid,
Your words bite with coldness.
You--

     suspending me,
until wind turns to whispers
     through daffodils and daisies--
Your face so warm,
Your words so secure and knowing.

Jagged fingers
          chisel through icy thoughts,
and lead me to springtime in you . . .

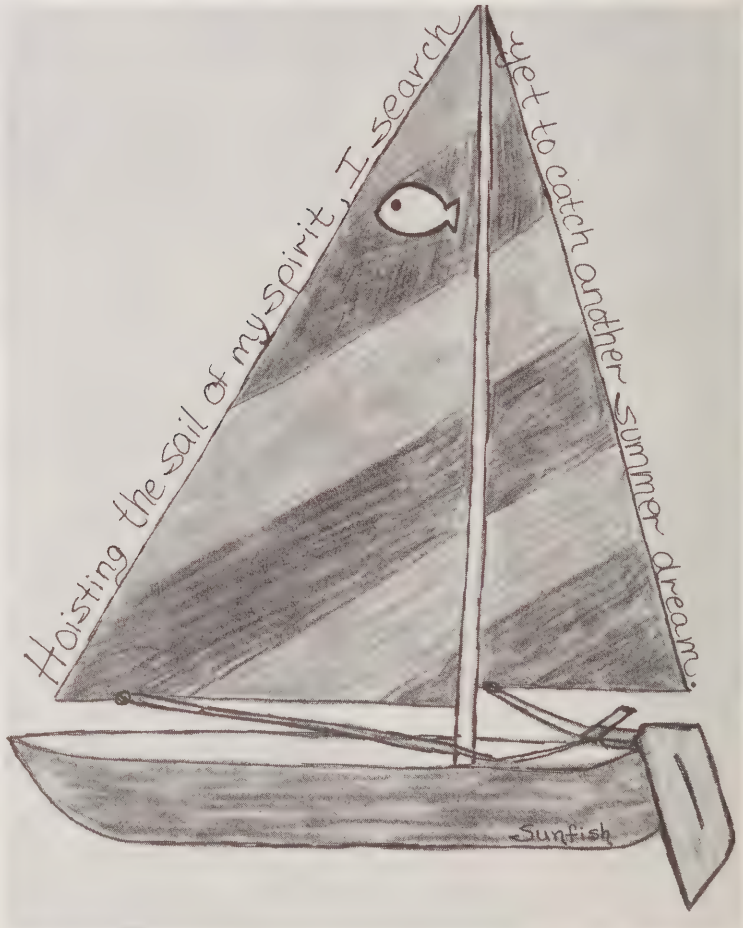
--Debbie Hobbs

you see me when
     i slip and fall;
you giggle when
     i stutter.
you laugh when
     i bump into walls;
you snicker when
     i shudder.

(my sleeve-print
     in the butter)

you always catch me
     at my worst;
those times
     i giddily weep.
but you would be
     so proud of me;
how graceful
     do i sleep--

--Sally Hamrick



--Linda Carlton

PROPHECY

Ten years from now
things will be changed.
my name, for instance,
not mine anymore,
or yours,
but someone else's.

And my average day;
no longer measured by
the bells of a classroom,
but instead on a schedule
of eight hour importance.

And I won't look the same.
my ribbons replaced with plastic rain bonnets?
bikini's, perhaps, with maternity smocks?
I wonder.

And my hourglass figure
that you value so highly
may more closely
resemble
a hard-boiled egg.

And I may replace
beer busts with bridge luncheons.
and Sunday hangovers
with morning worship.
and the closest I'll get
to a fraternity will be
the P.T.A.

But basically
I'll be the same
girl.
and ten years from now
when I'm lying in bed
late at night
trying to find sleep
over someone else's snoring
I'll think of you,
and how it felt when you touched me
and how we used to laugh together
ten years ago.

And after awhile
I'll roll someone over
to stop the snoring
and hold him very tightly
and cry myself to sleep.

--Amanda Davidson

APPLE OF TRUST

Eve's present
hanging luscious plump,
luring jealous red;
just a bite of juice
to quench my envy.
Please Adam!
Lie me under the shade of its tree,
bathe me in wisdom--
but don't let the worm tempt me.
Sit by my side for a Siesta,
toast your Sunrise to my Sunset
until again I am strong.
Then--dear Adam--venture
through the Marigolds
playing your flute to bees
until I become
hungry.

--Candy Clapp

MEETIN'

Big black hands
Stretch open pink,
Hellfire Damnation
Pray or Sink!
(Hallelujah, brother! Aman, aman!)

Palsied hands
Twitch and roam,
Lord's a-coming, Mary,
He's taking us home!
(Hallelujah, brother! Aman, aman!)

Worn, brown hands
Work and never sleep,
It's for the Lord, children,
Reach deep! Reach deep!
(Hallelujah, brother! Aman, aman!)

Small, scrubled hands
Pushed together tight,
Pray baby Jesus
For the coming of the Light!
(Hallelujah, brother! Aman, aman!)

(Hallelujah, brother! Aman, aman!)

--Paula Dale

IF I WERE TO WRITE

AN INVISIBLE POEM

ON TRANSPARENT PAPER

I WONDER IF YOU WOULD SEE IT--

--Debbie Hobbs

--Fowler Spencer

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